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The Rock Art of Eastern North America: Capturing Images and Insight

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Book Reviews and Notices

The Rock Art of Eastern North America: Capturing Images and Insight, edited by Carol Diaz-Granados and James R. Duncan. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004. xvii, 456 pp. Illustrations, tables, references, index. \$34.95 paper.

Reviewer Robert J. Hoard is the State Archeologist, Kansas State Historical Society. His research interests include the archaeology of the Midwest and the Central Plains of North America, and the chemical composition and performance characteristics of archaeological materials.

The Rock Art of Eastern North America focuses on rock art east of the Mississippi River. This in itself makes the book worthwhile for students of history and archaeology east of the Mississippi, as most rock art studies are directed toward sites in the western United States. Authors contributing chapters to the volume are primarily professional archaeologists, but several of the authors are from other disciplines. The book's primary subject is human-applied designs on rock, the designs being either pecked into large boulders or rock faces (petroglyphs) or painted on them (pictographs). These rock art sites often, but not always, are the work of American Indians, both from prehistoric and historic times. Although rock art is widespread, it is not common, and, as the editors note, it does not get the attention one might expect from the academic community. One reason for this may be the difficulty in interpreting the meaning of rock art and in determining when it was created, though progress is being made on this latter problem. Rock art also is threatened by natural erosion, vandalism, destruction through development of reservoirs and other projects, and even theft.

Not all of the chapters are concerned with rock art. The first chapter is on dendroglyphs (designs carved into trees) and their significance for historically documented eastern tribes. This chapter sets the stage for later chapters that attempt to interpret the meaning of rock art. Chapter four uses ethnography and medical studies to present pica and geophagy (consumption of soil and ground rock) as possible explanations for some of the pecked patterns on rocks, pointing out that human-made patterns on rock do not necessarily have meaning. Other chapters describe the results of surveys meant to locate, record, and conserve rock art sites, and methods used to document and date these sites, the latter including direct and indirect radiocarbon dating and use of dated sea-level changes in relation to rock art sites.

The main task of several chapters is to interpret the meaning of rock art. Some authors take care not to extend the meaning of symbols beyond what is readily observable or directly known from ethnographic or historical information. For example, chapter five documents 43 variations in style across geographic regions, patterned relationships between symbols and other archaeological features, and readily observable relationships of rock art symbols and those of late prehistoric people to whom archaeologists refer as Mississippian. Chapter 11 notes the proximity of rock art to bedrock mortars used to grind seed, and correlates this association to ethnographic and archaeological studies on agricultural practices.

Other authors reach much further to interpret the meaning of rock art symbols, some with more success than others. The two chapters by volume editors Diaz-Granados and Duncan, for example, present a mass of ethnographic information to build arguments about the meaning of rock art that some readers will not find adequately supported. Is this a problem? It depends. For the hard empiricist, yes, it is. For those who have less concern with supportable arguments and instead try to understand the minds of people of the past through rock art, the more exploratory interpretive chapters will be of the most interest.

Either way, this book meets the goal of being accessible to non-specialists and useful for professional archaeologists. It provides information on a topic that is poorly known in the region covered. It also emphasizes the need to find and record rock art before it disappears.

Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory, edited by David W. Blight. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004. xii, 337 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Frontline of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley, by Keith P. Griffler. The Ohio River Valley Series. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004. xvi, 169 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Galin Berrier is adjunct instructor in history at Des Moines Area Community College. He is the author of the chapter, "The Underground Railroad in Iowa," in *Outside In: African American History in Iowa, 1838-2000* (2001).

The two books under consideration appear at a time when both academic and popular interest in the history and legend of the Underground Railroad is perhaps at an all-time high. *Passages to Freedom* is a handsome, lavishly illustrated collection of essays by 15 historians published in conjunction with the opening of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati. *Frontline of Freedom* is a slender

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